

WE CLAIM AS OUR INVENTION:

1. A postage meter machine for franking postal items, comprising:
a printer adapted for printing a postage value stamp on a postal item;
a control unit for controlling operation of at least said printer; and
a security module, for debiting postage fee data used for producing said postage value stamp, which must be activated to permit said control unit to control said printer, said security module being electronically connected to said control unit and automatically, multiply interrogating said control unit to require handover of a security code from said control unit to said security module, said security module automatically deactivating itself, and thereby precluding printing of said postage value stamp, if said control unit hands over an incorrect security code or no security code upon each interrogation.

2. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said security module contains a module computing unit for conducting said multiple interrogations of said control unit, at regular time intervals.

3. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said security module contains a module computing unit for conducting said multiple interrogations of said control unit, at irregular time intervals.

4. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said security module contains a timer which deactivates said security module after expiration of a time duration following a last handover of a correct security code from said control module, if a further handover of said correct security code does not occur within said time duration.

5. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 4 wherein said timer randomly varies said time duration.

6. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said security module, after deactivation, automatically re-activates itself upon handover of a security code from said control unit to said security module.

7. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said control unit contains hardware having an identifier code associated therewith, and wherein said control unit and said security module use said hardware identifier code as said security code.

8. A postage meter machine as claimed in claim 1 wherein said control unit encrypts said security code, prior to handing said security code over to said control unit, to form an encrypted security code, and wherein said control unit hands over said encrypted security code to said control unit.

9. In a postage meter machine having a control unit for controlling printing of a postage value imprint on a postal item, the improvement of a security module, which must be activated to allow controlling of printing by said control unit, comprising:

at least one security module component for automatically, multiply interrogating said control unit to require handover of a security code from said control unit to said security module, and for deactivating said security module if said control unit hands over an incorrect security code or no security code.